

A
D E F E N C E
O F T H E
M E T H O D I S T S,
I N
F I V E L E T T E R S,

ADDRESSED TO THE

R E V. D R. T A T H A M,

CONTAINING SUNDRY REMARKS ON A LATE
DISCOURSE, PREACHED BY THAT GENTLEMAN
AT FOUR OF THE CHURCHES IN OXFORD,
AND ENTITLED

“ A SERMON suitable to the TIMES.”

By J O S E P H B E N S O N.

THE SECOND EDITION.

*I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone :
for if this counsel, or this work, be of men, it will come to
nought : But if it be of GOD, ye cannot overthrow it ; lest
haply ye be found even to fight against GOD, — Acts v.
38, 39.*

L O N D O N :

Printed by G. PARAMORE, North-Green, Worship-Street; and
sold by G. WHITFIELD, at the Chapel, City-Road; and at
the Methodist Preaching-Houses in Town and Country. 1793.

DEPARTMENT

OF THE DISTRICT

OF THE DISTRICT

OF THE DISTRICT

OF THE DISTRICT

OF THE DISTRICT

OF THE DISTRICT

OF THE DISTRICT

OF THE DISTRICT

OF THE DISTRICT

OF THE DISTRICT

OF THE DISTRICT



L E T T E R I.

Rev. SIR,

A FEW days ago, a friend put into my hands a Discourse of yours, preached at different times, in sundry of the Churches in Oxford. As I had frequently heard of your great Loyalty to the King, and of your strong attachment to the excellent form of Government established in these Kingdoms, I was much pleased to see your name on the Title-page of a Pamphlet, entitled, *A Sermon suitable to the Times*, hoping not only to be much edified myself, by the perusal of it; but expecting that it would operate as an antidote against the poisonous principles, which, at present, with no little eagerness and sedulity, are so widely disseminated in this land. But I am sorry to say, Sir, that when I came attentively to peruse the Sermon, I found myself compelled to entertain a very different idea of it, from that which I had formed; meeting with nothing *new*, or *important*, on the subject just referred to; and, on other topics, many things which appeared to me very liable to objection. As I owe more to Truth, especially truth of so sacred a nature, as that which is made the subject of consideration in your discourse, than I owe to any man living, I make no apology for the liberty I hereby take of stating my objections to you, and the public, in a few free Letters. As I shall endeavour to do this, in the spirit of meek-

ness and love, so I trust you will take in good part what I write, and hear me with patience.

My first objection respects what you advance in the introduction of your Sermon. Although you seem at first to grant the right of *private judgment*, in matters of religion, to "all characters and descriptions, all orders and degrees of men;" and to allow that the sacred Scriptures make it their duty to exercise that right, be their "capacities small or great;—their opportunities contracted or enlarged, and the means of judging, which they enjoy, whatever they may." Yet, afterwards, in explaining, "wherein this general duty of judging for themselves principally consists," you endeavour to make it appear, that there are insuperable difficulties in the way of the greatest part of mankind, should they attempt to extend it to the nature of *religion itself*, with the *truths* and *mysteries* of it; and that, therefore, it must be considered as referring *chiefly*, if not *wholly*, to their choice of Teachers. The *former*, you seem to think is beyond their capacity, and out of their province; but with regard to the *latter*, they may and ought to judge for themselves.

Your words are, "In what does this general duty of judging for themselves, which is incumbent upon all men, principally consist? For the same great Apostle who hath commanded men to *prove all things*, hath also informed us, that "great is the mystery of godliness."—And the book in which this mystery is disclosed to men, is a book of great antiquity, of supernatural authority; written in learned languages, and in a style in many parts almost as mysterious as the subjects of which it treats. In matters of such deep concern and difficult enquiry, how are all men enabled to judge for themselves." Why,

"it

"it is clearly the design," you say, "of the Author of our Salvation, that they who are possessed of weaker understandings, they whose minds are less improved, and they who are employed in the lower offices of life, should receive religious instruction from others who have greater opportunities to know, and are better qualified to judge." To this I have no objection. But when, after defining the qualifications of a Teacher to be, "ability of head and integrity of heart," and those of a learner "docility and obedience," you proceed to infer that even, "in matters of the last importance to their salvation, in which they must depend (you think) on the ability and integrity of others; the great and general duty of christians, at large, is to judge for themselves of *these qualities* in their Teachers, by those means of judgment which they possess; and [that] *this* is that important duty which St. John hath enforced upon all christians by the admonition in the text, *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God,*" I cannot agree with you.

I have no doubt, Sir, but it is the duty of christians in their choice of Teachers, to consider well, who they have reason to think are best qualified to instruct them; but that this deserves to be termed their *great and general duty*; or that it is the duty enforced by St. John in this passage, I much question. It is certainly a much *greater and more general*, as it is a *prior* duty, to judge of the *truth or falsehood, importance or non-importance* of the doctrine taught by the different Teachers, between whom our choice may be suspended; and it is chiefly by *this test* that we are to *try the spirits whether they be of God*. What avails it to me, Rev. Sir, what a person's *abilities* may be, as a Teacher, or, what

his *integrity*, if, on the one hand, he be *deceived* himself, and of course *deceive* me, by teaching what is false; or on the other, merely amuse me by teaching what is *unimportant*?—You suppose, and perhaps not without some reason, that the Socinian doctrine implies a spirit of error which both “deprives people of their happiness in this world, and bereaves them of their hope in the next;” and even, that “it is that evil spirit which was foretold by St. John in these words.” But can you imagine that they who chuse to sit under that doctrine, never consider whether their Teachers be persons of *ability* and *integrity*? As to *ability*, according to the common acceptation of the word, and according to what can be gathered from your Sermon as to your own ideas of it, they are, many of them, men of as great ability as most that take upon them the office of teaching; and with regard to *integrity* or *uprightness*, some of them, by renouncing their temporal emoluments in the church, have given unequivocal proof of this. But nevertheless, Sir, you would not commend that person who made choice of one of them for his Teacher. And why? undoubtedly, because you judge they preach *false doctrine*. But it may be asked, How do you know this? And how are any of their hearers to know it? Surely not by enquiring, whether these Teachers be men of *ability* and *integrity*, but by bringing their doctrine to the touch-stone of *Scripture*, and comparing it with the lively oracles of eternal truth. But it will be asked, How is it possible those persons should do this, with satisfaction, who cannot read the holy Scriptures in their original languages? I reply, equally as well as the Bereans did, who we learn from Acts xvii. 11. *searched the Scriptures daily, to see whether the things taught them by St. Paul and Silas really were as they reported* them.

them to be. These Bereans were *Greeks*, and most probably, in general, utterly unacquainted with the *Hebrew*, the original language of the Scriptures there meant. They could therefore only search them in the *Greek* translation of the *Seventy*; which, you know, is, in many places, far from being exact. And yet the Holy Ghost commends their conduct in this instance, and holds them forth as an example to others. You observe, Rev. Sir, it is not said, they exercised their judgment concerning the *qualifications* of Paul and Silas to instruct them, and upon being persuaded of these, manifested "docility and obedience;" but they enquired rather into the truth of the doctrine taught, and *searched the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so*. It would have signified little to them, how great the *integrity* and *abilities* of the Apostles were; they knew still they might be deceived themselves, and so might deceive others. *The blind might lead the blind*, and both might *fall into the ditch*. They had recourse, therefore, to a surer rule. They applied to the Law and the Testimony, and *searched the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so*.

As to any danger of deception from reading the Scriptures in a *Translation*, rather than in the *Original*, than can be but very small, especially in such an incomparable translation as ours. But, "the subjects treated on in Scripture are mysterious, and those holy books of great antiquity, and of consequence the style frequently as mysterious as the subject of which it treats." I answer, as to all points of doctrine and practice, that are essential to salvation, the Scriptures are sufficiently intelligible to the meanest capacity, as being manifestly written for the *common people*. And it has been, and is the judgment of many great

great Critics, that they are *more intelligible* to such, than to men of great learning; and that the sense in which a *common man* of ordinary capacity, would understand any passage of Scripture, is *generally*, if not *always*, the true sense of it. Add to this, that the very context *demonstrates* that you misunderstand St. John. For, in giving us rules whereby we may know the spirits whether they be of God, St. John does not say *one word* concerning either the *ability* or *integrity* of the Teachers in question, but simply concerning their doctrine. *Hereby*, says he, *know ye the Spirit of God*, i. e. that any Teacher is guided by his spirit, and teaches his truth: *Every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ to have come in the flesh, is of God*. It appears from the Apostle's words that there are certain *leading* and *fundamental* truths of Christianity (one of which, then, it seems, in danger of being denied, the Apostle names) which every true minister of the Gospel will teach, be his qualifications for the work, greater or less, and that every man's doctrine must be brought to the test of these *first principles*. These leading and fundamental truths are, Eph. ii. 20, termed the *foundation of the Apostles and Prophets*, as being the foundation which they laid; and Jude 3, *The faith once delivered to the saints*, as being the great doctrines which the saints were required to believe and hand down to others. For *these* we are to *contend earnestly*, (ibid.) and *to strive together* for the true knowledge of, and faith in them; and are to hold our belief of them (1 Tim. iii. 9.) *in a pure conscience*. If any man prophecy, or preach the word of God, he must preach according to the *analogy of faith*, (Rom. xii. 6. *κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν πίστεως*) or as St. Peter expresses it, as *the oracles of God*, these truths being declared with

with sufficient clearness in the holy scriptures. A summary of these the antient Church has given us in the Apostles and Nicene Creeds, and the Church of England in her *Articles, Homilies* and *Liturgy*, as most protestant Churches have in their *Confessions of faith*. However, no Creeds, Confessions of Faith, or Articles of Religion, are farther to be regarded than they can be proved by the Scripture, the *only* rule and the *sufficient* rule of both faith and practice. And with regard to *this*, every individual must examine and judge for himself; calling no man, let his abilities or even integrity be what they may, *master* or *father*, on earth, and crediting no man's doctrine further than it is, in his judgment, proved from Scripture: *in his judgment*, I say, for as every man must give an account of himself to God, so must every one judge for himself.

But while I speak thus, I would not be understood as insinuating that *abilities* are unnecessary, in a Teacher, or that an hearer is not in duty bound to pay much respect to them in his choice of one. Only I affirm, that the *main thing* he is to attend to, and that whereby he is to *try the spirits whether they be of God*, is the *truth or falsehood, importance or non-importance* of the doctrine taught. This to him is of greater importance, and ought to be more regarded than even the *integrity* of the Teacher; although the latter is of greater importance to the Teacher himself, as being a quality without which he cannot escape the damnation of Hell; whereas, it is possible, for a man ignorantly to teach erroneous or unimportant doctrines, or in the Apostle's language, to build with *wood, hay, and stubble*, and yet to be saved, although it be *as by fire*. Add to this, if my salvation depended, as you signify

p. 5, upon the *integrity*, as well as *ability*, of my Teacher, it would indeed be in a very precarious situation, and I could never be satisfied I had made it *sure*, as St. Peter exhorts me to do, 2 Epistle i. 10; for I never can be certain of any man's *integrity*, I never can have more than *probable* evidence of it: but as to the *truth* and *importance* of his doctrine, I may, from the holy Scripture, have *assurance* of this, and of consequence of my salvation as grounded thereon.

But that full justice may be done to your argument, let us see what you understand by these necessary qualifications of a Teacher, *Ability*, and *Integrity*; and by what rules an ordinary Christian is to judge whether any individual, that professes to be a Teacher, is possessed of them.—In looking through your Sermon for a definition of these two important qualifications, I find, I am disappointed. You no where, I think, inform us what you mean by them, save only, that you term the one *ability* of head, and the other *integrity* of heart. Now, Sir, if by ability of head, you mean, as I suppose you must, merely *learning* and *knowledge*; and if by integrity of heart, you understand only *uprightness*, I will undertake to demonstrate that a man is but poorly qualified to be a Teacher of Christianity, who has not some other endowment *besides* and *above* these.

But let us attend to the rules you give us, whereby, it seems, every one may *try the spirits whether they be of God*, and may judge for himself in regard to the ability and integrity of his Teacher. Perhaps what you advance on these heads, may give us to understand more particularly what you mean by these endowments. "In regard to the ability of his Teacher," (you observe p. 8.) "there is a rule whereby every one may judge

judge for himself, founded in his own experience and applied by common sense. However low he may be in the ranks of Society, and however mean in his employment, every man must have some trade or occupation by which he earns his bread." You mean, I presume, that every man *ought* to have one: for it is too certain, that every man *has* not, not even in the City of Oxford, or within the precincts of the University. Too many lounge away their lives in *idleness*, having neither *trade* nor *occupation*, and live upon the industry or liberality of *founders*, and others, not originally designed to encourage and support idleness and prodigality. "Or," you proceed, "he deserves to have no bread at all." Would to God, Sir, that this your sentence were put into execution in the University, as well as in other places; and that if any man *would not work*, at least, at his *studies*, he *might not be permitted to eat*! "To the exercise of that trade or occupation," you add, "self-experience must convince him, that some degree of learning, however humble, some kind of practice, however vulgar, is required. He must have observed, that to learn the art or business of a common trade, by the wise regulations of Society, men are bound to an apprenticeship of seven years: and if he will carry this self-experience and observation from one thing to another, a little common sense will enable him to conclude, that the profession of Divinity,"—say rather, *Christianity*, or *true religion*, for it is not the *profession of Divinity*, that the persons you speak of undertake to teach the common people, but the *religion of Jesus*, or the *nature and design of Christianity*; and to teach them this, not barely that they may *understand* and have *just views* of it, but that they may *experience* and *practise* it;

it; or, in other words, that *they themselves may be Christians*. But to proceed in your own words; —“The profession of Divinity must require much time and study, before men are qualified to teach and instruct others in the great duties and mysteries of religion.” Much *time and study*? Sir! It requires something more than time and study. It requires *supernatural illumination*: it requires a *birth from above*, a *new creation*: it requires a *conduct according to the Gospel*: and it requires the *presence and blessing of the Lord Jesus*, without whom no private Christian, and especially no teacher of Christianity, can do any thing to purpose in his office, and duty.

Permit me, Rev. Sir, to lay before you, some proofs of the truth of these assertions. And First, that a man may be qualified to instruct others in divine things, it is necessary that he should be *supernaturally enlightened*. *The natural man*, says the Apostle, 1 Cor. ii. 14. *ψυχικὸς ἀνθρώπος*, id est homo non alia quam naturali animi luce præditus, the man that is endowed with no other light of mind than that which is natural (*Beza*;) *receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*. They are discerned, *only* discerned, by the light of that Spirit which he has not received. And what wonder that this should be the case? May we not argue with the same Apostle, ver. 11, *What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?* that is, a man could not know *human things*, the things that *respect* and are proper to *human nature*, were he not possessed of a *human spirit*, a spirit superior to that of brutes; for *they* comprehend not the nature and affairs of mankind: *Even so the things*
of

of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God; —no man knows them unless he be enlightened by that Spirit, which alone understands and comprehends them. Hence it is that he affirms concerning himself, and the other authorized Teachers of that day, that *he that commanded light to shine out of darkness, had shined into their hearts, and that God had revealed divine things unto them by his Spirit, that Spirit that searcheth all things; yea, the deep things of God.* 1 Cor. ii. 10. which Spirit, and not that of the world, they had received, that they might know the things that are freely given to us of God: which things also they spoke, not in the words which man's wisdom taught, but which the Holy Ghost taught, Ver. 12. 13. And another Apostle affirms, that the Son of God was come, and had given them an understanding to know him that is true: alluding, probably, to the words of Christ, *No man knoweth the Father save he to whom the Son reveals him; and to the promise of God by his Prophet, I will give them an heart to know me.* No wonder, therefore, that the Apostle bowed his knee, to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, to supplicate, for the Churches to whom he ministered, the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of himself, that the eye of their understanding might be enlightened, so that they might know what was the hope of their calling, what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in his saints, and what his exceeding great power towards them that believe. And no wonder that he pronounced that man a reprobate, who had not Christ in him, 2 Cor. xiii. 5; while he declared that as many as were led by the Spirit of God, were the Sons of God.

Now, Sir, if no man can have a right knowledge of Christianity, without this supernatural illumination,

illumination, how can he, without this, be a proper *teacher* of it? Can a man, by the aid, of *Latin, Greek, or Hebrew, or the Mathematics, or any thing else, teach what he does not know?* I expect, Sir, that *you, or some others, into whose hands this may fall, will exclaim, "We don't pretend to inspiration."* If so, I reply, I am sorry for it. You did pretend to it once, when you professed to be moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you the sacred office; and you ought to pretend to it still, or acknowledge, that not having *the Spirit of Christ you are none of his,* and of consequence have no *authority to oversee or feed his flock.*

To be a Teacher of religion requires 2dly, *a birth from above.* It requires this, indeed, to be a *Christian*, and much more to be a *Teacher of Christianity*; for surely you will allow, that a man cannot teach what he has not learned. To use your own words, "You must have observed, that to learn the art or business of a common trade, by the wise regulations of Society, men are bound to an apprenticeship of seven years, and if you will only carry this observation from *one thing to another,*" you cannot but conclude that Christianity must be learnt "before men are qualified to teach and instruct others in the great duties and mysteries of it." But how must it be learned? In *theory* only? St. Paul did not think so; speaking of some, the description of whose character, as he has given it, Eph. iv. 17—19, suits too many, not only *professors*, but even *Teachers of Christianity*, as you, yourself, Sir, cannot but have observed: he adds, *But you, true believers, real Christians, have not so learned Christ, if so be that you have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus*; that is, if you have really learned him at all: *That*

ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness. Now Sir, if St. Paul is to be credited, no man, let his skill in *Languages, Arts, and Sciences*, be what it may, learns Christ, or Christianity, who does not put off the old man, and put on the new; and who is not renewed in the spirit of his mind; or in the language of the same Apostle, 2 Cor. v. 17, and Gal. vi. 15, who is not a new creature, old things, viz. old dispositions, words, and actions, passing away, and all things becoming new. Hence it was, that our Lord insisted to his disciples, Matt. xviii. 3. on the necessity of being converted, and becoming like little children, in order to their entering the kingdom of heaven; that is, in order to their enjoying the kingdom of grace, which is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, Rom. xiv. 17, and being members of the Church militant; as well as in order to their enjoying the kingdom of glory, and being admitted into the Church triumphant. A doctrine this, which he enforces still more in his discourse with Nicodemus, declaring that unless a man be born again, or born from above; or, as he farther explains it ver. 5, born of the Spirit, as well as of water, he cannot enter the kingdom of God; nay, cannot see, or have a proper acquaintance with the kingdom of God. Now Sir, if a man cannot see, or be properly acquainted with, and much more cannot enter into, or enjoy for himself, the kingdom of God, without this new, this second, this heavenly birth; how can he, without it, declare, aright, that kingdom to others, or enforce it upon them; that kingdom, of the nature of which, for want

of divine illumination and christian experience, he has not even proper ideas; and the *necessity, excellency and consolations* of which he does not experimentally know? I hope you will recollect, that Christianity is not like a *Science*, or an *Art*, the knowledge of which may be attained by mere *reading and study*: You know it is a supernatural endowment; the divine nature and superlative worth of which can only be learned by experience. It is *repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*: It is *justification by faith, and peace with God*. It is *Christ in us the hope of glory, Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith*. It is *the love of God and of all mankind shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given to us*. It is the image of God stamped upon the soul, and the divine nature communicated to it. It is humility, resignation, patience, meekness, gentleness, long-suffering, *the mind that was in Christ, and walking as he walked*. This, and this alone, is Christianity. He that, I do not say, *knows* these things in *theory*, but he that in a measure at least, *experiences* them, that *enjoys* them in his *heart*, and manifests their influence in his *life*, he is a Christian; and he that does not, is no Christian, or he is a *Christian without Christianity*. And he that takes upon him to teach Christianity, without the enjoyment of these things, that is, *without being a Christian*, takes upon him to teach what he has not learned; and, of consequence, what he has not ability to teach. He is therefore, to use your own language, "A mere pretender, an enthusiast who deceives himself, whom one may pity; or an impostor, who deceives others, whom a man should despise; and of consequence he is not one of the spirits that are of God." Nor will his acquaintance with Languages, Arts, and Sciences, alter the case

case at all. As he knows *Languages*, if he chuses, he may employ himself in teaching *Languages*. As he is instructed in *Arts* and *Sciences* himself, he may instruct others therein. But let him not attempt to teach what he has not learned, lest he be deemed an *impostor*. He has not *learned Christ*, in the *only* way in which he can be learned; he has not *put off the old man*, and *put on the new*, nor is he *renewed in the Spirit of his mind*; and therefore let him not presume to *teach Him*. Or if he will presume to do what he has not ability for, and will *thrust himself into the Priest's office for a morsel of bread*, or for any other less justifiable motive, let not any expect much light to be reflected upon their paths, from his *unlighted lamp*; or to be guided through the wilderness of this world, in their way to glory, by his *false fire*,

I read 3dly, *A conduct according to the gospel*, is requisite, to constitute any man an authorized teacher of Christianity. *For unto the wicked, God saith, what hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my Covenant in thy mouth? seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee.* Psalm l. 16, 17. Do you suppose, that an acquaintance with ancient or modern learning, that skill in *Languages*, *History*, *Logic*, *Mathematics*, *Philosophy*, or any other branch of human literature, can give an *ungodly* man a right to teach *godliness*? No, Sir, nor the imposition of a *Bishop's* hand added thereto. One grand branch of religion, and the foundation of every other branch, is the *knowledge of the true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent*, and every teacher of religion, who is sent of God and understands his office, will, in the first place, teach this. But can that man teach others to *know God*, who does not know him, himself?

who never received *an heart to know him*, as Jeremiah expresses it; or, as St. John says, never had *an understanding given him to know him that is true*; or, in the language of St. Paul, who never sought and found the *Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him*. Now no wicked or ungodly man has obtained these. For if any man say he knows God, and keepeth not his commandments, he is a liar, affirms St. John, and the truth is not in him. No wicked or ungodly man, therefore, knows God himself, or has the ability to teach the true and saving knowledge of him to others. And if he be unqualified to teach this first principle of all religion, how much more, the higher and more sublime truths? But were it otherwise, and he were ever so well qualified to teach divine truth, would not his practice more than counteract the good effect of his doctrine, and, render all his labours abortive? Add to this, that going on in sin, he could not expect, what is equally necessary, with any of the particulars I have named, to render a person's ministry successful; and that is 4thly, The presence and blessing of the Lord Jesus. Without me, said Jesus to the Apostles and first Preachers of his word, ye can do nothing.—We are not sufficient of ourselves, says the Apostle, to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God, who hath made us able ministers of the new Covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. Indeed we cannot be Christians without supernatural help, as we have already seen, christianity implying a new heart, a new birth, or a new creature. How then should we, without supernatural help, be able to make others Christians? The gospel, wherever it is successful, comes, not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, 1 Thes. i. 5; and is accompanied with the power of God unto salvation,

tion, to every one that rightly believeth. It is therefore recorded that when the Evangelists and Apostles *went forth preaching every where, the Lord wrought with them.* And have the ministers of the Gospel in the present day less need of his working with *them*? Surely they have not. And they have cause to be thankful that he has promised it to his faithful servants, as long as the world shall stand. For (Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.) he has commanded, *Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* Leaving you to reflect, Sir, upon the great and momentous truths, just laid before you; truths of the last importance to all who sustain the sacred character of *Ambassadors of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God,* and earnestly praying that you, and all who minister in holy things, may be so impressed with a sense of their *certainly and importance,* as not to rest without the *experimental* knowledge of them; I forbear to trouble you further for the present, but subscribe myself, Rev. Sir, your obedient Servant in the pure and unadulterated Gospel of Jesus Christ,

JOSEPH BENSON.

Manchester, Feb. 1st, 1793.

LETTER II.

L E T T E R II.

Rev. Sir,

SINCE I took the liberty to address you, in the preceding Letter, upon the important subject of the qualifications necessary for a Teacher of Christianity, I have been very seriously reviewing the many testimonies of *holy Writ*, which I made free, then, to lay before you, and whereby I endeavoured to prove, that, independent of what you advance respecting *time and study; divine and supernatural illumination, a birth from above, a conduct* according to the Gospel, and the *presence and blessing* of the *Lord Jesus*, are absolutely necessary, to qualify a man for that sacred office. I now intrude upon your leisure a second time, and assure you, that these testimonies appear to me to be so *plain, so express, and so incapable* of being construed into any other meaning, that one may safely venture to commit the cause to their decision. You, however, Rev. Sir, make your appeal to very different vouchers. With you, *Schools and Colleges, Books and Libraries*, are the ALL IN ALL. And you are very confident that, by the way of life in which they who profess to be Teachers have been bred and educated, and from the opportunities they have enjoyed of receiving religious instruction, and from the years they have spent in the study of languages, sciences, and other necessary parts of learning, every one is enabled to judge for himself, without any depth of reasoning, who are best qualified to be Teachers."

I am sorry, Rev. Sir, that you have put the matter upon this issue, as it lays me under the disagreeable necessity of touching upon a subject I wished

wished to have passed over without notice, and of making a comparison I wished to have avoided, as knowing it may, probably, gain me ill-will; while it turns out neither to *your* honour, nor to the credit of the *cause* in which you engage. You will remember, however, Sir, that you compel me to it, and have only yourself to blame for the consequences. It is not our custom to meddle at all with the Clergy. The Preachers, that occasionally visited Oxford, did not meddle with them; as I am well assured, by a Letter from a friend, whose word I can depend upon, now before me: and the people did not; but *simply* and *quietly* went on their own way, without troubling themselves with others. You do not attempt to say that their doctrine was *false*, or their lives *immoral*, which, had it been the case, might have moved you, out of compassion to their souls, to interfere for their good. Least of all had they discovered any the smallest marks of *disloyalty* to the King; but, on the contrary, like their brethren all over the kingdom, had given unequivocal proofs of a strong and unshaken attachment to his person and government. There was not, therefore, the least provocation given, in any way whatever, for the *rude*, *malevolent*, and *unjust* attack you have made upon us; an attack, Sir, which you could not have had the face to have made, had you had the *slightest* acquaintance with the people you so grossly abuse.

The Methodists of Oxford, I have reason to believe, are not less pious or virtuous, than their brethren in other parts. They conduct themselves, I doubt not, as becometh the Gospel of Jesus Christ: which, as it is of far greater value before God, than *wealth* or *power*, for which perhaps they are not very conspicuous; so it is an attainment which their persecutors, and those
that

that malign them, have not arrived at. — Do not mistake me, Sir; I shall not recriminate, much less shall I return *railing* for *railing*. I shall simply make the enquiry which your Sermon manifestly calls upon all to make, that wish to know who are best qualified to be Teachers; I shall examine what that “way of life is, in which they that profess to be teachers, both in the established Church, and among the Methodists, have been bred and educated; and what the opportunities are, which they have enjoyed, of receiving religious instruction?” As to “the number of years spent in the study of Languages, Sciences, and other, (what you term) *necessary* parts of learning,” *that* I shall take little notice of; believing that the *degree of knowledge* attained, is a matter of much more moment, and better deserving of regard, than the *number of years* spent in the attainment of it; save that greater length of time, spent in acquiring any language, or branch of Science, is a proof of *greater dulness*, or of *less application*.

That I may give honour to whom honour is due, I shall first pay attention to those that are, or intend to be, Teachers in the established Church, and enquire how they are “generally bred and educated.” You know, Sir, that many of them, and those not only the younger Sons of Noblemen and Gentlemen, for whom provision must be made in the Church, if expectations from the *Army*, the *Navy*, or *Merchandise* fail; but divers others also, are from their very *infancy* designed by their Parents, or Tutors and Guardians, for *holy Orders*, and that not from the purest motives; nay, without any regard to what certainly ought first to be considered, viz. Whether they manifest any *inclination* to the sacred office, any marks of *piety*, or even any *capacity* for

for necessary learning. As to the *last* particular, it is frequently the case, that if a Father have a son more dull than any of the rest, he will bring him up for the Ministry, for "If the boy be fit for nothing else, he will do well enough for a Parson." With a view to be *Parsons*, therefore, at a proper age, they are sent to some of the great Schools, suppose to Westminster, or Eaton. Well Sir: how are they *instructed* and *governed* there? and in what manner is their *spirit* and *conduct* formed and regulated? Are they brought up, I will not say, as persons intended for holy Orders should be brought up, in the *true spirit* of *Christ*, and his *first servants*: the *spirit of prayer* and *watchfulness*, crucifixion to the world, *heavenly-mindedness* and *divine love*; but as St. Paul exhorts all Christian parents to bring up their children, in the *nurture* and *admonition*, *καὶ παιδεία καὶ νουθεσία*, the *discipline* and *instruction* of the Lord? Is even their outward conduct properly watched over, or any due care taken to counteract the vicious propensities of the carnal mind, and keep their morals untainted? There, however, in the space of seven or eight years, if they have any tolerable capacity, they learn Grammar, and read many of the Latin and Greek Classics. But withal, not a few of them learn also *many* and *great* vices. They are sent to the University, where, if their acquaintance with the ancient languages be continued, I fear it is not often much encreased, but perhaps, some knowledge of *Logic*, *Mathematics*, and even *natural* and *experimental* Philosophy is superadded thereto. In the mean time, it is notorious, that vice and profaneness generally make *equal* or *greater* progress; and too evident proof is given daily, that though they are designed to teach others the *fear* and *love* of God, that *fear* is not before their eyes, nor that *love* in
their

their hearts. They take degrees in the Schools, one or two, according to their standing in the University, not in general according to their *merit*; but in the School of Christ they take no degree, not even the *first*, that of *repentance from dead works*; and much less the *second*, *faith*, justifying faith, *towards God*. They do not so much as perform their baptismal vow, and *renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this evil world, nor the sinful lusts of the flesh*. The time comes, however, that they must enter into *holy orders*, and undertake the *cure* of souls, although their own souls are not only not *cured*, but not even made sensible of their spiritual disorders. Accordingly, the Greek Testament, and such Latin Classics, as the Bishop, or his Chaplain are wont to examine the Candidates in, are applied to for a few weeks; and perhaps also, Burnet on the Articles is looked over, in order that if any enquiry should be made respecting the doctrines of the Church, they may not be quite at a loss for an answer. Thus prepared, and too often under a full conviction that there is no *Holy Ghost* to be received, and that every pretence to his sacred influences, in our times, is mere enthusiasm; they appear before a RIGHT REV. FATHER IN GOD, and without *any real concern* for their *own souls*, solemnly declare they *trust they are moved by the Holy Ghost*, to take upon them the care of the souls of others. This is the way, Sir, in which, as you cannot deny, many hundreds are continually bred and educated, to be teachers in the established church; and this is the way in which they are introduced into their sacred Calling. At the same time, however, I rejoice to allow, that not a few, at *some* schools, and at *both* Universities, are bred and educated in a very different

ferent manner, and enter upon their holy office from pure motives, and in a right spirit. But many of these, you know, Sir, are stigmatized with the appellation of *Methodists*; and because of what you have termed, their “greater sanctity of character, and formality of devotion,” as well as for their strict adherence to the doctrine contained in the Articles and Homilies, are made the objects of reproach, and held up to ridicule, even among their brethren.

As to the opportunities, which, you think, those that enter upon the ministry in the established Church enjoy, of receiving religious instruction, I allow that in some Schools and Colleges they are very great. But in too many, there is at least, one great and capital defect. The *fundamental* and *essential truths* and *duties* of Christianity, contained in the Articles, Homilies, and Liturgy, of that Church of which they are designed to be ministers, are not explained to them, and enforced upon them; nor are they given to understand how necessary it is that they should be *enlightened*, and *renewed* by the Holy Spirit, that they may have *just* and *affecting* views, of the nature and importance of these truths and duties themselves, and may take due pains to inculcate them upon others. Public Lectures I grant, are read, and *coldly* enough; and in some Halls and Colleges, private ones also, upon the *Evidences of natural and revealed religion*, and other subjects remote from the *life and soul*, the *experience* and *practice* of Christianity; but when are *repentance towards God*, *faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*; *justification by faith*, *a new birth*, &c. together with *holiness* of heart and life, enforced? And when are endeavours used to make them sensible, that it is not enough to *understand* these things in *theory*, but that it is necessary they should experience

them in their hearts, and manifest the power of them in their tempers, words, and actions? Nay, when are they directed with regard to what, of all other things is most important, and is *first* to be attended to by all that would enter into the sheepfold by the right door, I mean, a *right intention*, in undertaking the sacred office of *feeding* and *overseeing* the flock of Christ? Are they given to understand that their *end* ought to be, not *ease*, nor *preferment*, nor *wealth*, but only *the glory of God* and *saving souls from death eternal*? And that to be influenced by other and meaner motives, is to be devoid of that *single eye*, which our Lord so much insists upon; and to render their whole conduct in the ministry a scene of ignorance and sin, of folly and vanity, and to bring upon themselves the *curse* of God, instead of his *blessing*? Alas! Sir, this is a point that is seldom or never mentioned, or thought on. And no wonder, for how few *School-masters*, *Tutors*, or *Heads of Colleges*, could say a word about it, without more or less condemning themselves? Is it not notorious that the expectation of preferment in the Church, of a *Vicarage*, a *Rectory*, a *Prebendary*, if not even a *Bishoprick*; of a *Living*, nay, if possible, of *two* or *three*, or at least of a *competency*, a *warm* and *comfortable* livelihood, is the *chief*, if not the *sole* motive which induces most parents to think of bringing up their children for the church, and most young men to offer themselves for holy Orders? This is not even attempted to be concealed, but is avowed in the face of the sun, without one blush upon the cheek! Such persons, however, as one justly observes, "Cannot be compared with *Simon Magus*, for they are many degrees beneath him. He offered to *give* money for the gift of God; the power of conferring the Holy Ghost. Hereby he shewed that he set an higher value on the *gift of God*,"

God, than on the *money* which he would have parted with for it. But these do not: they set a far higher value on *the money* than on *the gift*; inasmuch that they neither desire, nor will they accept *the gift*, unless *the money* accompany it. The Bishop says, when they are ordained, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." But that is the least of their care. Let who will receive *this*, so they do but receive the money, the Revenue of a good Benefice. While they minister the word and ordinances before God, he gives the Holy Ghost to those who duly receive them, so that *through their hands* likewise the *Holy Ghost* is in this sense *given* now. But they have little concern whether he be or not; so little that they will minister no longer, he shall be given no more either through their lips or hands, if they have no more money for their labour. O Simon, Simon! what a faint wert thou, compared to many of the most honourable men now in Christendom."

"Let not any either ignorantly or wilfully mistake me, adds this Author. I would not *muzzle the Ox that treadeth out the corn*. I know the spiritual labourer too is *worthy of his reward*; and that if we sow unto our flock *spiritual things*, it is meet that we *reap of their carnal things*. I do not therefore blame, no not in any degree, a Minister's taking a yearly salary: But I blame his *seeking* it. The thing blameable is, the having it in his view, as the motive, or any part of the motive, for entering into this sacred office.

Hic nigræ succus loliginis, hæc est
Ærugo mera.

If preferment, or honour, or profit, was in his eye, his eye was not single. And our Lord knew no

medium between a *single* and an *evil* eye. The eye therefore, which is not single is evil. It is a plain adjudged case. He then that has any other design in undertaking or executing the office of a minister, than purely this, to *glorify God*, and *save souls*, his eye is not *single*. Of consequence it is *evil*; and *therefore* his *whole body*, must be *full of darkness*. *The light which is in him is very darkness*. Darkness covers his whole soul: He has no solid peace; he has no blessing from God: And there is no fruit of his labours.

“ It is no wonder that they who see no harm in this, see no harm in adding one Living to another, and if they can another to that; yet still *wiping their mouth*, and saying, they *have done no evil*. In the very first step their *eye was not single*: therefore their mind was filled with darkness, so they stumble on still in the same mire, till their feet stumble on the dark mountains.”

The above quotation, Rev. Sir, I have made from *An address to the Clergy*, by the late Rev. Mr. Wesley, a Tract which I would hope you never saw, otherwise you would be inexcusable indeed in representing the Methodists as a people who “ set all learning at defiance, and hold all Science in contempt.” For in this pamphlet, Sir, Mr. Wesley argues strongly for the *great utility* and *deep importance* of more learning and knowledge, in their various branches, than *one half*, perhaps I may say, than two thirds of the Clergy of the established Church possess. This he does likewise in sundry of his other works, which as they are much valued, so they are continually read among us, and have induced many hundreds to apply themselves to the study of *human* as well as *divine* learning. Nor are we so illiterate a people as you seem to imagine. In this respect we are pretty much upon a level with our neighbours; although we are far from exalting *learning* above *grace*,

grace, or even of equalling it therewith; and much more from supposing, as you seem to do; that it will supply the place of it. That you have “ magnificent Libraries, built by the generosity of founders and others, for the benefit of your studies,” and great advantages for attaining Learning and Science, we know. We only wish, that these advantages were made a better use of than they are, by the generality of young gentleman who resort to the Universities, and spend years in those abodes of erudition. But as the matter is, hundreds that never visit these seats of Science, but are ordained from Schools and private Academies, are equal, if not superior in education, to many that learn to pronounce ALMA MATER. And some, through the incapacity or negligence of the Tutors appointed them, or from other causes, find not the advantages there which they expected.—I, for one, Sir, can bear testimony to this. Above 20 years ago I entered at Oxford, in hopes of perfecting my education in the Languages and Sciences. And as this was soon after the *Doctors* and *Masters* in full Convocation, a general search being made, had expelled from the University not only all that *prayed extempore*, or *read and expounded* the Scriptures to the poor and ignorant in private houses in Town or Country; but also, all that were judged deficient in capacity or learning; had I not reason to expect I was become a Member of a *very learned*, as well as *pure* body? But how great was my astonishment and mortification, when waiting upon my Tutor Mr. B——, to know in what books he would give me Lectures, I was given to understand that the books which the Gentlemen, under his care, read, (some of whom were in Orders,) were *Cornelius Nepos*, and the *Greek Testament*, and that I must go through these books with them. After attending a few times at the

hours appointed, unable any longer to brook so much loss of time, I made bold to intimate that these books, and most of the *Latin* and *Greek* Classics, were very familiar to me, as I had taught them all for some years at a Grammar School near Bristol. He then informed me, that he would excuse my attending, but as none of the other Gentlemen under his care were capable of reading any other books, he could not conveniently give me lectures in any other. I was therefore obliged, though at the University, to be, what you call "self-taught," for I did not receive the smallest assistance from any, save that I attended, for a few times, public Lectures on Divinity, read by the *Regius Professor* at Christ Church, and went through a course of Lectures on experimental Philosophy. I should have been glad if my Tutor, who so willingly excused me from attending his *learned Lectures* in *Cornelius Nepos*, would also have excused me from paying him the usual stipend; but though he did not do the *work*, he had no objection to receive the *wages*, which I accordingly regularly paid him, and for which I still have his receipts. But to return: Among the Methodists, whose Preachers you wish to hold out to contempt and ridicule, as wholly unqualified for their office, a very different plan is pursued, as to the Admission of Teachers. They have no more idea of commissioning a *Servant of the Devil*, to *oversee* and *feed* the *flock of Christ*; or of setting apart a man, who is himself *ungodly*, to teach *godliness* to others, than they have of appointing a *wolf* to take care of *sheep*. With them, therefore, the first consideration is *piety*; and what you term *ability*, is but the *second*. And in judging of this ability, they would be sorry, with you, to appeal to "Magnificent Libraries," or years spent in what you term, deep and important studies; knowing, that

that some of the veriest blockheads in the Age or Nation, can boast of these. Nor do they attend chiefly to skill in *Languages* and *Sciences*, although these, they allow, have their use; and in *these* several of them are not a whit behind many of the Clergy in the Church of England; but they regard what is of far greater importance, a *thorough knowledge* of the *Scriptures*, and of the *grand doctrines* of *Christianity*, and such a measure of elocution as will enable them, with previous meditation and prayer, to communicate, as opportunity offers, that knowledge to others. With the Methodists, Sir, it is a *maxim* to admit no person as a Preacher, (no not upon *trial*,) of whose *genuine piety* and *good conduct* they have not had satisfactory evidence; and of whose acquaintance with the truths of the Gospel, and ability to instruct a congregation, there is not, at least, what is thought *sufficient* proof. And after a person is *received* upon trial, he is not *continued*, unless it manifestly appear that there are fruits of his labours, and that lost sinners are brought to God by his ministry. Add to this, that a person must be at least, *four years* upon trial, before he is received into *full* connexion; and at the end of that time he is not admitted, unless it be manifest, 1st. That he has given every proof of *solid piety*, and has adorned the Gospel during these four years: 2dly. That he has ability for the work in which he is engaged; and 3dly. That his labours have been attended with the divine blessing. And even when he is admitted, he is not admitted for *life*: but if at any time afterwards, during the course of his ministry, any thing of importance can be proved against him, as to want of *piety*, *ability*, or *fruit*, he is still rejected, and another more fit for the important office is put in his place. And let it be observed, that during the whole time of his remaining on
trial,

trial, and after his admission, he is continually increasing his stock of knowledge, by buying up all his spare time, and employing it diligently in reading and study.—So that, according to your own rule, “ By the way of life in which they who profess to be teachers have been bred and educated, and from the opportunities they have had of receiving religious instruction,” if not also “ from the years they have spent in the study of languages, sciences, and other useful parts of learning, every one is enabled to judge for himself, without any depth of reasoning, who are best qualified to be teachers,” I will not say, with you, “ in the most difficult and learned of all Professions,” for I have a very different notion of Christianity, from that which seems to be conveyed in these words ; but in the most *spiritual, holy* and *sacred* of all institutions ; an institution, whereby degenerate man is to rise out of the ruins of his fallen state, is to escape the corruption which is in the world through carnal desire, is to recover the favour and image of God lost by the fall, and to partake of the *divine nature* ; & instead of being *earthly, sensual* and *devilish*, is to be made *heavenly, holy* and *divine*. Sincerely praying that you and I, and all that name the name of Christ, and especially all that speak publicly in his name, may be, not only *professors* but *possessors* of *this Christianity*, I subscribe myself, Rev. Sir,
Your servant in Christ, &c.

L E T T E R III.

Rev. S I R,

UPON looking farther into your Sermon, I observe, that the foundation of your error, with respect to the qualifications of a Teacher of Christianity,

Christianity, is laid, in your not attending to its *nature*. If Christianity were, as you term it, a *difficult* and *learned profession*, it would indeed be true, that only men of learning were qualified to teach it, and such might be qualified to teach it, let their temper and behaviour be what they might. Men of learning, though self-willed and impatient; angry, malicious, envious; covetous, ambitious, unjust; nay, though revellers, drunkards, unclean persons; fornicators, adulterers, and murderers, might be able to tell what names different nations and ages have given to different doctrines and duties, virtues and vices, truths and errors, professions of faith, articles of religion, heresies and sects, and might be able also to communicate to others just ideas of these things. But if, after a man has learned and believed all these things, he may be as distant from Christianity as the Jewish Scribes and Elders, High-Priests and Princes of this world, that crucified the Lord of glory; if Christianity be *sorrow for sin, confidence in the mercy of God through Christ for the pardon of it, love to God and all mankind, humility of mind, and meekness of spirit, resignation to the divine will, and patience under the dispensations of his providence, productive of a blameless, edifying and useful conversation*. In short, if it be *purity and love*, with their proper fruits, then it is most certain, a man may both know and enjoy these himself, and teach them to others, although he understand no language but that which is common to him, and the person or persons that learn of him. Nay, if he were not to utter one word, there is a language in his actions, in his spirit and conduct, in his temperance and chastity, his justice and mercy, his devotion to God and beneficence to man, which cannot but be heard far and near, and understood by the meanest

meanest capacity, and which has a much more powerful and lasting influence than ten thousand critical and learned lectures.—It was thus, Sir, that Jesus Christ and his Apostles taught Christianity. They preached by their *practice*, in the simplicity of their hearts; and in the fear of God, made known his truth to mankind, in terms of obvious signification, and such as were easily understood by the lowest of the people. These of course (like those of the inhabitants of Oxford whom you complain of as running after illiterate teachers, while, it seems, they desert the lectures of the learned and dignified doctors,) crowded after them wherever they came, as finding, in their discourses, *food for their souls*, although not without incurring the severe censures of the learned Rabbies, and self-righteous Professors of that day, who in language somewhat similar to yours, only a little more severe, pronounced, *This people that knoweth not the Law are cursed, for have any of the Scribes and Elders believed on him?*—The simple people, Sir, that follow after “the *Methodists* and *Enthusiasts*, *Anabaptists* and *Dis-senters*,” are obliged to you that you do not pronounce a similar Anathema upon them. They take it kind that you content yourself with denominating them “*blind*,” and with affirming that those that lead them are *blind* also, “self-taught without power, and, self-ordained without even the appearance of learning, men out of the meanest professions and lowest occupations of life,” (professions as mean and occupations as low as those of the crucified Carpenter, whom they preach, and the twelve poor and illiterate fishermen his attendants,) “whom, (you go on) had they a fair opportunity of trying” (what a pity they have not!) they would find more ignorant and unqualified than themselves.”—Thank you, Sir,

Sir, for your *good-will*! For this sentence was undoubtedly dictated by your *heart*, rather than your *head*. You cannot sincerely *think* that all the *Methodists*, *Anabaptists* and *Dissenters* of every kind answer this description; but, no doubt, you *wish* that they did; and I fear, you wish too, to make the nation believe it; to make them believe what a person of much less information than you cannot but know to be a *lye*. I believe Sir, whatever you may think of their *Ordinations*, few parties of them would *ordain*, or keep in their connexion, a person that would thus calumniate whole Societies of people, unless he gave some solid proofs of his repentance for the wilful *slanders* he endeavoured to propagate; *slanders* which only shew the malevolence of the heart from which they proceed, but cannot materially affect the numerous classes of people they are designed to injure. No: the *Methodists* at least (for I will speak in behalf of the people I am acquainted with,) are too well known, and have been instrumental of too much good in the nation, by turning sinners to righteousness, as well as by setting on foot and promoting works of charity of various kinds, to be much hurt by such illiberal reflections; even though you should be permitted to preach your sermon in every church in the Kingdom, as well as in those at Oxford; and should circulate it at a lower price than at 2s. 6d. per dozen, through town and country.

Can you imagine, Sir, that the various bodies of Dissenters in this Kingdom, are "self-taught, without power, and self-ordained without learning?" I believe you cannot suppose it. You must know that their learning, taking them number for number, is by no means inferior to that of the members of the established church; and that their *Ordinations* are as solemn in themselves, and

as effectual to every purpose of sacred service in the Church of Christ, as those of the ministers that are episcopally ordained, if not more so. I say, if not *more so*. For I believe, upon the whole, that much more care is taken, not to admit *improper persons* into the ministry among most classes of Dissenters, than in the Church of England. And pray, Sir, what is *Ordination*, but the *setting apart persons, properly called and qualified, for the purpose of overseeing and feeding the flock of Christ, by such as are proper judges, and are already in the same ministry*; as having themselves been formerly set apart for the same purpose, by others? Now Sir, this is done among the Independents, Anabaptists, Methodists, and other Societies of people whom you take upon you to censure.—The Methodists, indeed, approving of the *Doctrine and Liturgy* of the established church, and wishing to remain in connexion with it, have avoided using the word, *Ordination*, unless with respect to the Preachers they have appointed, for a few years last past, for *Scotland, America and the West-India Islands*; but the *piety, the virtue, the knowledge, the utterance* at least, of every one that is recommended as a Preacher, are particularly enquired into; and, as I have observed above, the *fruit* too, whether God has already owned the endeavours they have used to call sinners to repentance, and made them successful in turning any from the power of Satan unto God. But you know, Sir, that in the Church of England, it is no uncommon thing for persons that are manifestly *unholy*, to offer themselves as Candidates for *holy Orders*; and for those that are *ungodly* themselves, to profess solemnly before a *Right Rev. Lord Bishop, his Chaplain and others*, that they sincerely believe, they are *moved by the Holy Ghost* to take upon them the office of *teaching godliness*. And, you know, too, Sir, that hands, whether

whether *holy* or *unholy*, I will not say, are not seldom laid upon such. This might be more excusable, if it were always observed, that the *holy Orders* which authorized them to teach godliness to others, induced them to become godly themselves. But the contrary is too evident, and we have but too ample proof, in Town and Country, that a man may be invested with the sacred Office, even by a *Bishop*, or *Arch-Bishop*, and yet have nothing sacred in his *spirit* or *behaviour*. I assure you, Sir, I take no pleasure in mentioning this, but the fact is too notorious to be concealed : and it is both a *pity* and a *shame* that it is not remedied.

You wonder, Rev. Sir, at the infatuation of the people of Oxford, in that they will run after these *Methodists*, *Anabaptists*, and others. You have given them a *rule* whereby they may judge who are best qualified to teach them, and “ it is with amazement and concern you see it so much neglected,” in the very place “ where of all others it is the most obvious. They enjoy (you think) a singular opportunity of judging for themselves, by being eye witnesses of the many years you devote to deep and important studies, to qualify yourselves for your sacred and sublime profession. They bear witness to the expences you incur in the prosecution of these studies : and they experience the advantages of these expences. They have heard of the many lectures in Divinity which are read in that University, both public and private. Daily and hourly they behold” (Oh ! happy, happy Oxonians!) “ those magnificent libraries, built by the generosity of founders and others, for the benefit of your studies. But notwithstanding these opportunities of trying you by this rule, and notwithstanding there are more than a dozen parish-churches, built by the

D

piety

piety of their forefathers, in which you are ready to instruct them to the utmost of your power, you see many of them (to your own inexpressible grief no doubt!) led away with itching ears by ignorant and itinerant Teachers of every denomination, by Methodists and Enthusiasts, by Anabaptists and Dissenters, (you will excuse my repeating this elegant and benevolent sentence) of whose learning and abilities they have not had the smallest proof; men who are self-taught, without power, and self-ordained, without even the appearance of learning; men out of the meanest professions, and lowest occupations of life; whom if they had a fair opportunity of trying, they would find more ignorant and unqualified than themselves—Blind leaders of the blind.”

Such is the charitable language in which you have declaimed at four of the Churches in Oxford, and such are the means by which, as I am this moment informed, you have contrived to stir up a mob, against a few poor innocent people, met together in a peaceable manner in a place duly licenced, to worship God, and receive the word of Christian instruction and exhortation; a people Sir, as *loyal* to the King, and as *firm friends* to the form of government established in this kingdom, as you, or any of the members of the University; and, I believe I may add, not less pious, or virtuous. However, through your *illiberal, abusive* and *slandrous* harangue, a lawless rabble of gownsmen, and others of the baser sort, assembled, obliged the Preacher to leave the pulpit, overthrew the seats in the chapel, and beat and otherwise ill-treated many of the people. Such, Sir, is the blessed fruit of your preaching! Such is your loyalty to your King, to stir up the mob against a people to whom he graciously grants his protection! And such is the order kept in the

the famous City of Oxford ! In many other kingdoms it would be the duty, and even the interest, of the followers of the *despised and persecuted* Jesus, tamely to suffer such *outrages* ; as indeed they might not be able to help themselves, nor obtain any redress ; but under a *free government*, such as the *British*, which allows all descriptions of people, liberty to worship God in the way they judge most pleasing to him, and edifying to themselves ; it is neither necessary, nor proper, quietly to put up with it. I am glad, therefore, our friends are taking effectual measures to teach your good Christians at Oxford, a little more of their duty to God, and to their king and country, than, it seems, they have learned from *four times* hearing your *famous Sermon* ; or even from the daily and hourly sight of your **MAGNIFICENT LIBRARIES**. The *Law*, you know, Sir, is *made for the lawless*.

I was sorry to be interrupted and checked, Rev. Sir, by the above intelligence, at the very moment when I was going to tell you, how glad I was, to hear you give so good an account of yourself, and the other gentlemen of the University ; and when I was upon the point of congratulating you, the *City*, and *nation*, upon the happy change, which it seems has taken place in your *Halls* and *Colleges*, since I had the honour to tread their courts. About twenty years ago, it was otherwise. The inhabitants of Oxford were too often spectators of very different scenes, from those you describe ; and that with respect to not a few who walked the streets in robes of Science and Literature : Instead of being *eye witnesses* of their great diligence in pursuing, "deep and important studies, with a view to qualify themselves for the sacred and sublime profession," of preaching the Gospel of Christ, they frequently beheld much

time wasted in idleness, or consumed in Taverns, Gaming-houses, and similar haunts of vice and profaneness. It is well, however, that there is so great an alteration for the better. May it long continue! and may the citizens of that highly favoured city, (*fortunati nimium, sua si bona norint!*) whose streets are so continually crowded with learned men, not only "bear witness to the *expences* you incur in the prosecution of your studies, and *experience* the *advantages* of those expences;" but also be daily edified by the shining example of your unparalleled diligence, as well as by the sight of your magnificent Libraries, stately Halls, and princely Colleges!

And, if I might be permitted to express my wishes yet further, I would say, may greater evidence be afforded the people of Oxford, daily, that these *deep* and *important* studies are undertaken and prosecuted, out of *love* to their *souls*, and the souls of others, and with a *view* to the *glory* of *God*; and not from a principle of *self-love*, and with a view to *wealth*, *honour*, or *preferment*? You justly think it possible, the people may have *heard* of the many Lectures "in Divinity which are read in the University, both public and private;" I hope they will also hear soon that those Lectures are *well attended* by the students, for whose benefit they were instituted, and will see the fruit of them appearing more and more, in the spirit and behaviour of those to whom they are given. When this is the case, and when the gentlemen of the University in holy Orders give satisfactory proof of their *knowledge of the Scriptures*, and of those fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, which are epitomized in the Articles of that Church, of which they are admitted Ministers, *then* the inhabitants of Oxford, as well as of other places, where their lot is, or may be cast, will

will soon see, and bear witness, that they are *workmen that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.* But till then, the bare “knowing that the wisdom of our government has provided schools and places of learning, for the regular qualification of men, who are to be called by due authority to be the ministers of the national Church,” or added thereto, “the beholding daily and hourly those magnificent libraries built—for the benefit of their studies. will never convince any that those, whom they find to be destitute of every qualification proper for an *Ambassador of Christ, a Steward of the mysteries of God,* are divinely commissioned by him, and appointed to be Shepherds of their souls; nor prevent them from attending the ministry of those teachers whose conduct they find to be irreproachable,—and whose word is made the *power of God to their salvation.*”

But while I speak thus, I would by no means be understood as insinuating a general charge against all the Clergy of the Church of England, as you have done against Methodists, Anabaptists, and Dissenters of every description. I am well assured that many of them are an ornament to their profession, and are public blessings to the Cities, Towns and Villages, where Providence has cast their lot. Not a few of these, I have the honour to be acquainted with, in different parts of the kingdom; and know that the *ignorance and wickedness* of those, that are of a different character, are truly and deeply lamented by them, as a public calamity in this nation. They lament too (to use the words of the Bishop of St. David's, in his most excellent charge to the Clergy of his Diocese, delivered at his primary visitation in the year 1790) “The erroneous maxims which are gone abroad, and which for several years past,

have very much governed the conduct of the Parochial Clergy, in the ministration of the word. One of which is, that the Laity, the more illiterate especially, have little concern with the mysteries of revealed religion; provided they be attentive to its duties.—Another is, that practical religion and morality are one and the same thing: that moral duties constitute the whole, or by far the better part of Christianity.

“Both these maxims, (as his Lordship justly observes,) are erroneous. Both, as far as they are received, have a pernicious influence on the ministry of the word. The *first*, most absurdly separates practice from the motives of practice. The *second*, adopting that separation, reduces practical Christianity to heathen virtue; and the two, taken together, have much contributed to divest our Sermons of the genuine spirit, and favour of Christianity, and to reduce them to mere moral essays: in which moral duties are enforced, not, as indeed they might be, to good purposes, by scriptural motives, but by such arguments, as no where appear to so much advantage as in the writings of the heathen moralists, and are quite out of their place in the pulpit.

“Thus, under the influence of these two pernicious maxims, it too often happens, that we lose sight of that which is our proper office, to publish the word of reconciliation, to propound the terms of peace and pardon to the penitent; and we make no other use of the high commission we bear, than to come abroad one day in seven, dressed in solemn looks, and in the external garb of holiness, to be the Apes of Epictetus.”

Now, Sir, I will leave you and the public to judge, whether those persons are very well qualified to instruct others in the important truths and duties of Christianity, who, added to the *ungod-*
liness

linefs and *immorality* of their lives, are under the influence of these erroneous maxims, even in their public ministration of the word ; maxims subversive of the *whole of Christianity*, so far as it is a divine system, superior to, and distinguished from, those of the Heathen Moralists ; and who, of consequence, deceive and mislead their hearers, in the weighty matters of salvation ? And I leave you to consider too, whether a *little*, or even *much* knowledge, of *Latin* and *Greek*, and other *dead* or *living* languages, supposing that a perfect acquaintance with every branch of Science were added thereto, can compensate for the mischief done by erroneous doctrine, in points of such importance, and a vicious practice ? Whether is a person of little learning, who, however knows himself, and declares to others, though, in plain language, the truth as it is in Jesus, and adorns the doctrine of God his Saviour, with an holy and unblameable spirit and behaviour ; or one, who is deeply learned in *Languages, Arts* and *Sciences*, but is unacquainted with the true Gospel of Christ, is *erroneous* in his principles, and unholy in his life ; which of these, I ask, is best qualified to teach others the doctrine which is *according to godliness*, and can only be understood by supernatural illumination ? And which of them is most likely to be instrumental in turning men from the evil of their ways ? I think, Sir, a very small degree of penetration is sufficient to enable any one to answer these questions. However, lest the subject should not appear to you, in the same point of clearness it does to me, I will give you time to consider it, and again subscribe myself, Rev. Sir,

Your's, &c.

LETTER



L E T T E R IV.

Rev. SIR,

I Perceive, upon a review of the paragraph quoted above from your Sermon, that you mention *Itinerant Preachers* with contempt. They appear, I doubt not, in your eyes, in a very despicable point of view indeed. And in the same despicable point of view, had you lived in that day, it is probable the Itinerant Preacher *Jesus Christ*, would have appeared; the son of a Carpenter, and himself a Carpenter, without birth, and without education, "self-taught, without power, and self-ordained without even the appearance of learning." In the same light too, you would have viewed the *twelve Itinerant Preachers* he sent out *first*, to travel through all the cities, towns and villages of Judea; as also the *seventy* he sent out afterwards. Nay, all the *Itinerant Preachers*, that, in consequence of the *great persecution* raised against the Church in Jerusalem by the learned Scribes, Doctors, and Elders, were *scattered abroad* throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, and *went every where preaching the word*, would have appeared to you, it is likely, as objects of equal contempt. And had you had your abode in any *town or city* where the *Itinerant Preachers*, *Peter or John, Paul or Silas, Timothy, Titus or Apollos* came, if I may judge from the spirit and tendency of your Sermon, I must conclude you would have been ready to excite, or join the general cry against them, "*Men of Israel help, for the men that turn the world upside down are come hither also!*" And if you had lived at the time of the reformation, what would you

you have thought of such *Itinerant* and *field* Preachers as the Rev. Mr. *Gilpin*, who year after year, travelled regularly through even the mountainous, uncultivated, and uncivilized parts of Cumberland and Northumberland, as far as the borders of Scotland, frequently to the great hazard of his life, with the sole view of communicating Christian knowledge, and endeavouring to effect a reformation in the manners of the people. And whether you know it or not Sir, the late Rev. Mr. *Wesley* pursued, and with abundantly more success, a similar plan, preaching the very same genuine doctrine of the Gospel, the doctrine contained in the *Articles*, *Homilies* and *Liturgy* of our Church, and prosecuting the same benevolent design. And the Preachers that were in connexion with him during his life, and have survived him, with those that have been admitted members of their body since his death, have been, and some of them for 40 or 50 years, and still are engaged for carrying on the same work. Their one object is to leaven the nation with the *saving knowledge* and *love* of God, with *piety* and *virtue*. And blessed be God, their labours are not in vain. As amidst all the refinements of the present age, *ignorance* and *sin*, nevertheless so abound, that there is no less need of preaching now in this and other nations, than there was in the days of *King Henry the Eighth*, or *Edward the Sixth*; so that, of the Methodist Preachers has been attended with great success. Many thousands in Great Britain and Ireland, in America and the West India Islands, have been turned from *sin* to God. And your unwillingness to see and own this, Rev. Sir, is nothing new. It is only a further accomplishment of an ancient prophecy, a prophecy accomplished but too often in different ages and nations already, *Behold ye despisers, and wonder, and per-*
ish

rish : for I work a work in your days, which ye will in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you. You may declaim, concerning the weakness of the instruments, and their want of learning ; and may indulge your suspicions, that they have sinister ends in view : But this is only what your predecessors in unbelief have done before you. In this manner the Scribes and Pharisees declaimed against the Apostles and first Christian Teachers, and the Papists against the Reformers. Those who are influenced only by worldly motives themselves, will always suspect that others act from the same principles. And such as are strangers to the virtue of the doctrine of the cross upon their own hearts and lives, will, like the Jews and Greeks of old, either require a sign, or seek after wisdom. But the servants of Jesus, neither fearing the censures, nor coveting the praise of their fellow creatures, but singly regarding the approbation of their Master, will still go on, preaching Christ crucified, to some a stumbling block, and to others foolishness ; but to all that are called, whether rude or learned, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.—For my part I speak from experience in this matter. I have been an Itinerant Preacher for upwards of twenty years ; and during that time have laboured in many of the Cities, large Towns and Villages of England and Scotland, preaching generally three and often four times on a Lord's day, and once, twice, or thrice on almost every day besides ; and as I know the trials and difficulties I have gone through, and the motives that have influenced myself, so I have no reason to impute other motives to my brethren, whose lives I know to be exemplary, and their word to be attended with a blessing, and very many of whom have gone through much greater hardships than have
fallen

fallen to my lot. Indeed were they actuated by any other views than a regard to the glory of God and the salvation of mankind, they must be out of their senses to continue in their present employment, as they neither gain, nor can gain, *honour* or *profit* by it; and opportunities have not been wanting, for many of them to do much better for themselves and families, in temporal matters. For what sum, Sir, would you be hired, to quit your *warm* and *downy* nest, relinquish your ease, honours, and pleasures, and travel by night and day, in summer and winter, in heat and cold, fair weather and foul, from Village to Village, from Town to Town, from Country to Country, preaching once, twice, or thrice, every day throughout the year, and putting up with such fare and accommodations as you might meet with; which you may be sure are sometimes not much better than those Jesus Christ and his first servants met with? Ah! Sir, if I am not much mistaken, it must be a pretty large sum that would hire you to go through all this, for *thirty*, *forty*, or *fifty* years together, as some of the Preachers among us have done, till worn out by labour and fatigue, persecutions, and hardships of various kinds, they have been obliged to quit their ranks in the Army of Emmanuel, and retire, like old soldiers upon a scanty allowance, into garrison; if, prior to this, they have not fallen in the field of battle, and sunk quietly down into the silent grave.—It is an easy thing for you, Rev. Sir, in the midst of *affluence*, *ease*, and *honour*; and possessed of abundance of *leisure*, to sit down in your warm and comfortable apartments, and write bitter invectives and slanderous declamations, against Methodists, Enthusiasts, Anabaptists, and Dissenters, while, however, many of them, are employed in *nothing else*, from day to day, than
in

in supplying *your* and *your brethren's* lack of service, and doing the *work* for which *you* and *others* receive the *wages*; preaching the Gospel of Christ to the poor and illiterate, and endeavouring daily to *seek* and *save* lost sinners. But are you sure, Sir, that the Lord Jesus Christ will applaud you for what you have done? for exciting a mob, of Gownsmen and Gamesters, Tinkers and Ale-sellers, not to mention B——ds and Wh——s, *armed with sticks, and spears fixt in them*, against a company of inoffensive, peaceable, and well-behaved people, assembled together to hear that *genuine* Gospel which you, Sir, seldom, if ever preach; and to learn that duty to God and their King, which you very rarely will be at the pains to inculcate upon them? You may declaim upon the excellency of the British Constitution, and make a shew of great Loyalty to the King, but do you think, Sir, were your conduct, in this instance, to reach the royal ear, that his Majesty would commend you for it? Was the late Rev. Mr. *Wesley* so cold in his attachment to King George, and are the numerous bodies of Methodists, spread all over Great Britain and Ireland, and the West-India Islands, such bad subjects to the government they are under, that the higher Powers with their suppression? Ah! Sir, I am persuaded, if you think so, you are greatly mistaken. His Majesty, I believe, is not uninformed, whether you are or not, who are sincerely loyal to him, and from *principle* attached to his person and government. Nay, Sir, have the community at large reason to praise you? Are the Methodists found by experience to be such *nuisances*, on the one hand, or of *so little use* on the other, in the nation; such enemies to *good order*, or so *remiss* and *slothful* in *good works*, that people in general desire their extinction?

tion? Sure I am, Sir, in places where the Methodists are numerous, as in this neighbourhood, throughout the West of Yorkshire, in the populous parts of Staffordshire, Worcestershire, and Cornwall, at Birmingham, Bristol, and London, Liverpool, Hull, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Sunderland, and many other of the manufacturing and trading Towns, the *Parish Officers, Overseers, and inhabitants in general*, would have no cause to praise you, were you to effectuate, what, blessed be God, will never be in your power, the extirmination of Methodists. The effect of their preaching in rendering *drunkards* sober, *thieves* honest, the *idle* and *slothful* diligent and *industrious*, the provision they make for their own poor, many of whom they keep from being troublesome to the parish, the *benevolent Societies* which they have instituted in almost all the large Towns, as at London, Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, &c. for the relief of the *poor, afflicted, and destitute*, of every denomination; their liberal contributions to charitable institutions of *every kind*, as to *Infirmaries, Hospitals, and Sunday Schools*, which in very many places they have introduced, and which, in very many *they alone* keep on foot; these things demonstrate that they are public blessings, in the Towns and Countries where divine Providence has favoured with increase.——

In this Town *alone*, Sir, the last year, the collections in the Methodist Chapels for the Infirmary and Lunatic Hospital amounted to 102£. for the Sunday Schools 114£. for the poor of their own Society to about 200£. while the subscriptions for the *Strangers Friend*, or *benevolent Society*, instituted for visiting and relieving the *poor, the fatherless, the widows, the afflicted*, and such as have *no helper, of any, and every denomination*, amounted from Nov. 7, 1791, to Nov. 1, 1792, to

no less sum than 427*l*. It is true this last mentioned charity meets with very liberal support from many gentlemen and ladies in this Town and neighbourhood, who are not members of the Methodist Society; but the Methodists had the happiness of first instituting, as they still have of conducting this admirable beneficence; the *Visitors* and *Committee* being *all* of their Community. I mention these things, Sir, with *one only* view, that, if possible, your eyes may be opened to see the greatness of your guilt, in endeavouring to raise the public odium against a people, who to my certain knowledge, within these fifty years last past, have been instrumental in the hands of God, of reforming the lives of many thousands; I believe not fewer than two or three hundred thousand, in Great Britain, Ireland, and America; and of relieving, in a variety of ways, the temporal wants of *myriads*. However, Sir, if all this has *no weight* with you; if you can see no more excellency in these things, than the *Jewish Scribes*, and *Doctors* did, in the good works of the first Christians; or than the *learned Papists* saw, in the deeds of spiritual and temporal mercy, done by the Protestants, in this and other kingdoms, at the time of the Reformation; if you still think them to be *enthusiasts*, and *hypocrites*, and in the ardour of your zeal, still exclaim, *Away with such a people from the earth!* I will put you into a method whereby you may effectually *stop* their *further progress*, if not also gradually effect their *extinction*. You, and your Brethren, the Clergy of the established Church, have only to do as they do, to *feel inwardly the same concern*, and to *manifest outwardly the same diligence*, to do *spiritual and temporal* good to the bodies and souls of mankind. Go forth from place to place, and preach as they do; I do not say in *Preaching-houses*,

ing-houses, much less in dwelling-houses, barns, and stables; no! far be it from me to desire you to disgrace your dignity so far! but in the stately Cathedrals, and regular Parish Churches; preach the pure doctrine of the Church of England, Repentance towards God, Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, Justification by faith, producing peace with God, a new birth, or a new creation, and universal holiness of heart and life. Preach these things in full assurance of faith, and from sincere and ardent love,—love to God, to mankind, and to these precious truths of the everlasting Gospel. Experience them first, and then preach them. Be yourselves truly penitent, and then call others to repentance. Believe in the Lord Jesus yourselves, with your hearts unto righteousness, and then invite others to believe. Be yourselves justified, born of God, and in Christ new creatures, and then speaking what you do know, and testifying what you have seen, urge upon all around you the necessity, excellency, and felicity of the same divine change. Being yourselves holy in all manner of conversation and godliness, engage others in the daily and hourly pursuit of the same holiness.—Preach these important doctrines, on which the present and everlasting welfare of the human race depends, in language which all, even the most illiterate, may understand, and in the free, familiar, and pointed manner, of a direct application from the pulpit; and not in the unnatural, forced, distant, and unaffecting method of coldly reading a pre-composed discourse; which, however well suited to the state of the audience, they can never prevail upon themselves to believe is directly intended, and immediately addressed to them, and whose force therefore they will seldom or never feel. Imitate our Counsellors, pleading at the bar, and our Senators haranguing

in the Parliament-house. Speak from a *thorough acquaintance* with the matter in hand, and an *heart felt concern* that your arguments and persuasions may be successful. Consider your subject before hand as much as you please. View it on all sides. Fathom, if possible, all its depth, and comprehend its length and breadth. Get what light you can from others, and especially from him who is the *light of the world*, and is made of God unto his followers *wisdom*. Study it upon your knees, and supplicate the illumination of that Spirit *which searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God*. Thus enter into the *full meaning* of your text, and feel its *full force*. And with a mind, charmed with the beauties, awed with the terrors, exhilarated with the joys, or melted and refreshed with the consolations of divine truth, go up into the pulpit, and *out of the abundance of your hearts, let your mouth speak*. Thus, Sir, will your tongues be as the pen of a ready writer, and your words, I will not say with the heathen Poet *ενα πτεροειδη, winged words*; but, in the language of the sacred Penman, an *hammer*, and a *fire*, breaking stoney hearts in pieces, and consuming the chaff of vanity and sin; yea, as a *two-edged sword*, piercing the sinner's conscience with deep compunction, and slaying the lusts that war in men's members: while like the *oil* and *wine*, which the good Samaritan poured into the wounds of the dying traveller, they administer divine consolation and spiritual healing to all the broken in heart.—In this way, Rev. Sir, especially if (as St. Paul exhorts) you *be instant in season and out of season, instructing, convincing, rebuking, and exhorting, with all long-suffering and doctrine*, as you will supercede the necessity, so you will undermine the importance of the preaching of these itinerant *Enthusiasts* and *Methodists*. And let me

me say, Sir, while England is a *free* nation, and the body of the people have the *Bible* and *Common Prayer-Book* in their hands, and are at liberty to judge for themselves, respecting the *truth* and *importance* of the doctrine taught them, in no other way will you ever be able to do it. It is true, to enter heartily upon this plan, will cost you all carnal pleasures, and worldly honours, and will require more labour and toil, and a much greater degree of self-denial and mortification, watchfulness and prayer, than it is fashionable to practise. But, be assured Rev. Sir, *divine grace* and habit will make it *easy*, the *consolations* of the *Holy Spirit* will make it *pleasant*, and the *fruit* will be *glorious*. This being an important subject, and one that deserves to be maturely weighed, I will forbear to call your attention to any thing new at the present; but deferring what I have further to observe to another opportunity, shall leave you to your meditations, and again subscribe myself, Rev. Sir, your obedient Servant in a free and pure Gospel,

J. BENSON.

L E T T E R V.

Rev. SIR,

MUCH additional light will be cast on the subjects of my former Letters, if we go on to consider, in one Letter more, what you advance with respect to the *integrity* of spiritual Teachers. "Some of these Teachers, you observe, however ignorant," (say of *Languages* and some branches of *Science*, for as to the *great Truths* of Christianity, they are much better acquainted with *these*,

than many of those who attempt to censure them,) "have the art to persuade their hearers, that their greater sanctity has called down from heaven a greater degree of illumination, which sets all learning at defiance, and holds all science in contempt." These must be very ignorant Teachers, indeed, Sir, both in imagining they are *more holy than others*, when it is manifest they are not holy *at all*, and that this supposed *greater sanctity* has called down (that is, has *merited*) from heaven a greater degree of illumination, thus subverting the order of things, and making that holiness, which is the effect of divine illumination and grace, to be the cause thereof. I hope, Sir, you will inform the world who these teachers are, and where they practise this iniquitous art, that mankind may be on their guard against them. For my part, though I have been in all parts of the kingdom, and am pretty much acquainted with religious people of all denominations, I have not yet met with any that answer this description, that themselves believe, or endeavour to persuade others, "that their greater sanctity has brought down upon them a greater degree of divine illumination." I suspect, Sir, that in this instance, the ignorance is *your own*, and that you neither *understand what you say, nor whereof you affirm*; neither know the subject you undertake to write about, nor even the meaning of your own expressions. *Their greater sanctity has called down from heaven a greater degree of illumination!* Is this the language which the Methodists, or any of the other classes of people, you so bitterly inveigh against, hold forth, either in their Sermons or Writings? No, Sir, they believe and teach, not that the *holiness of man* merits the *grace of God*, but that the *grace of God*, produces *holiness in man*; and that, from first to last, *by grace we are saved through faith*. But, Sir, though the idea of our holiness

calling

calling down from heaven divine illumination; be so absurd, that no person pretending to any true knowledge of the Gospel of Christ can, for one moment, admit of it; yet if a servant of God, that truly fears and loves him, and spends his life in obedience to his will, were to judge himself more illuminated, than a servant of the Devil, whose life is a scene of folly and sin, and who is therefore represented in scripture as being in darkness, and walking in darkness, and not knowing whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes, it does not appear to me, that he would judge much amiss. Nay, if a person, whom you, Rev. Sir, might pronounce *illiterate*, because he understood no language but his own, and was but little read in any branch of Science, but was well acquainted with the great doctrines of Christianity, and was a *new creature in Christ Jesus*, were to suppose himself possessed of more divine light and knowledge, than a learned Rabbi, who was under the influence of such erroneous maxims as those above mentioned, and whose life was a scene of vice and profaneness, methinks he would be very justifiable in the sight of God and man.

“ But,” you add, “ in addition to the superior light, they put on a sanctity of character and a formality of devotion, superior to those of the more intelligent and duly educated ministers of the Gospel.” They had need, Sir, to put on a sanctity of character and a formality of devotion, superior to those of many Ministers, however intelligent and duly educated, for, you know, they put on none at all. But pray Rev. Sir, how do you know that this *sanctity of character* and formality of devotion, as you express it, is merely *put on*? And what do you mean by saying, “ they persuade their hearers that their greater sanctity has called down—a greater degree of illumination;”

mination;" and adly, that " in addition to this delusion of superior light, they put on a sanctity of character ?"—Do you mean that they put on this sanctity of character both as an *under* and an *upper* garment, divine illumination being interposed between them ? If all this were not mere *shadow* and *pretence*; if there were but any reality in it, I should suppose that they put on this *double robe of righteousness*, to make, if possible, some amends for the *error* and the *sin* of those teachers of religion who clothe themselves, (I had almost said with cursing *as with a garment*; but I will say) with raiment of a very different kind, and are by no means blameable for making too great pretences to extraordinary sanctity or devotion!

" But, (you go on) as neither we nor ye are sensible of any extraordinary gifts or special illuminations," any more, you might have added, than the Pharisees, Scribes, and Elders among the Jews were, of the gifts and illuminations of the primitive Christians, or even of Christ himself, or his Apostles; " As none of us feel ourselves much wiser or much better than our neighbours," having neither entered in *at the strait gate*, nor walking in the *narrow way*, but along with the world, *lying still in the wicked one*, 1 John v. 19. " let us withhold our admiration of these wondrous men, whilst we judge of them by such plain rules of Scripture, which we believe is that true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." Hold Sir; here is a small error, Do you not deify the Scriptures? Do you not put them in the place of the Word, *that was in the beginning with God, and was God*? They cannot be that *true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world*, unless the Scriptures be really given to, and understood by every one. But to suffer you to proceed; " By such plain rules of Scripture, as the meanest understanding may

may apply, and by which we may be able to determine whether they be of God." Very good: This, I will answer for them, is all they desire. Let their *doctrine* and *practice*, as well as the *fruits* of both, be brought to this test, and let it be judged of accordingly; and let not the *Clergy* of the established Church, be above submitting to be tried by the *same unerring rule*.

"Beware of false Prophets," saith our Lord himself, which come to you in sheep's cloathing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so, every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit: a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit: wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." An admirable rule indeed; and, as you justly observe, "plain in itself, plain in its illustration, and plain in its application." But is it possible, Sir, that you can be *serious* in your appeal to it? Are you really willing, that, (I will not say,) the *spirit* and *temper*, but the *conversation* and *behaviour*, of the members and Clergy of the Church of England, should be brought to this test, and judged of accordingly? Are you willing that they should be deemed *corrupt trees*, who do not produce *good fruit*? Methinks Sir, if you had searched the whole Scripture, you could not have found a text that more effectually condemns many of those you wish to justify. Be this as it will, Sir, the *Methodists*; whether Preachers or people, are perfectly willing to stand or fall by this rule. And you are welcome to understand it either of the *fruits* of their *preaching* and *labours*, or of their *tempers*, *words* and *actions*. As to the former, they can produce many thousands, in the
British

British dominions and America, who were once, most of them, notorious sinners, now manifestly turned from the evil of their ways, and walking in all God's ordinances and commandments blameless; not to mention the much greater multitude from their Societies and Congregations that during the last fifty years, have departed this life in God's faith and fear. And as to the *latter*, they are not ashamed to testify, that they enjoy in themselves, and make it their daily care to manifest to others, in their temper and behaviour, the very fruits which you mention as characteristic of the Spirit of God; and I trust, in a much *truer* and *higher* sense, than that in which you understand them; even in the sense in which they are represented in the holy Scriptures, to be enjoyed in the hearts, and displayed in the lives of the faithful.

“ To judge of the secret springs and principles of the heart, (as you justly observe,) and of those motives which lie buried within the breast, is indeed a difficult and a delicate task: but, when the Founder of our salvation, who was himself the searcher of hearts, has fore-warned his Church to beware of false teachers, and has given us the rule by which they are to be tried; to apply that rule is a solemn duty of religion, in obedience to that command.”—It certainly is, Sir, and I would to God it were applied more frequently than it is. What follows, is equally worthy of attention and regard. “ What these fruits are, by which we are directed to try the spirits of men, both good and evil, as by the stream we trace the fountain, whether bitter or sweet, from which it flows, Scripture, that infallible rule of judging, has accordingly informed us. The fruit of the Spirit is *Love, Joy, Peace, Long-suffering, Gentleness, Goodness, Faith, Meekness, Temperance.*”

ance."—And would you wish, Sir, that the integrity of all teachers, of those in the *Church of England*, as well as of the *Methodists*, *Anabaptists*, and others, should be brought to the test of this rule? Shall we take it for granted, that all who do not enjoy in their hearts, and manifest in their lives, these fruits, are devoid of that integrity, which you have declared to be an essential qualification of an authorized teacher of religion? If so; I fear, Sir, the consequence will not be what you would wish it.

Please to remember, in the first place, Sir, that if these be the *fruits* of the *Spirit*, it is not possible they should be where the *Spirit is not*, even as the fruits of *light* and *heat*, cannot be where light and heat are not; nor the fruits of *life* and *health*, where there is only sickness, disorder, and death. Now, Sir, can you imagine that those persons have this Spirit, or are influenced by his presence, who confine all inspiration to the primitive ages of Christianity, and utterly deny that any such thing can be enjoyed now? And how many teachers in the established church do this, you probably may be a better judge than I am. I can only say, that my mind has been repeatedly pained, as well in hearing it denied from the Pulpit, as in observing it denied from the Press. And then, if, as the Apostle testifies, 2 Cor. iii. 17, *where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty*, even liberty from the dominion of sin, (Rom. vi. 14, and viii. 1,—10;) if he that *commit sin*, as Christ testifies, *is the slave of sin*, and as St. John bears witness, *is of the Devil*, whereas *he that is born of God doth not commit sin*, it will follow, that all that are in bondage to sin, i. e. as Christ and his Apostles explain it, all that *commit it*, are also devoid of this Spirit, as being destitute of this *one, grand, never-failing fruit* of it.

it. This mark, therefore, sets aside all open sinners of every kind, as drunkards, whoremongers, adulterers; swearers, sabbath-breakers, profane persons; lyars, slanderers, evil-speakers, and even the covetous, ambitious and effeminate, who either, *living in pleasure, are dead while they live*, or pursuing wealth, honour or preferment, as in adding one living to another, or changing one for another, for no other reason but because it brings in *more money*, or requires, as the term is, *less duty*; demonstrate that they are earthly and *sensual*, if not even *devilish* also.

That there are none of this *ungodly* and *vicious* stamp still employed as teachers of *piety* and *virtue*, in the established church, I think, Sir, you will not take upon you to say. But we must not stop here. Suppose a Teacher of religion does not affirm, on the one hand, that there is *no Holy Ghost* to be received now; nor disgrace his profession, on the other, by an *ungodly* or *vicious* practice; yet we have no right to conclude immediately that he is certainly possessed of the Spirit of Christ. We must remember, a man, whether private Christian or public Teacher, may, like the Angel of the Church of Sardis, have *a name to live and be dead*; and, like those who (according to St. Paul's Prophecy would *depart from the faith* in the latter days, may have *a form of godliness* and *deny the power* thereof: We must enquire, whether, professing to be *Christ's* they have *crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts*, Gal. v. 24; in other words, whether they have power over inward sin, so as to have in them the *mind that was in Christ*, and *walk, even as he walked*. And inasmuch as good nature, on the one hand, and a regard to decency and reputation, on the other, will frequently carry a person a great way in external things, and cause him to put on, what
you

you Sir, have termed a greater sanctity of character and formality of devotion;" we must go *one step* further still, and bring his temper and behaviour to the touchstone of those *fruits of the Spirit*, which you have very properly appealed to, as the test of a man's integrity in the office of the Ministry. We must enquire in particular, whether he has *love, joy and peace*, i. e. according to Rom. v. 1,--6, whether, *being justified by faith he has peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ*, producing peace of conscience; even *a peace that passeth all understanding, keeping his heart and mind through Christ Jesus?* Whether he has *access by faith* into that grace in which true believers stand, and *rejoice in hope of the glory of God?* whether he *loves*, sincerely and fervently loves God, who first loved him? yea, whether the *love of God be shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him*, so that *dwelling in love he dwells in God, and God in him*; and for God's sake, loves all mankind, not excepting his bitterest enemies? And as it is of the greatest importance not to be mistaken in this point; as it is most certain, that whatever a person may have, if he have not this love, *he is nothing*; if he *speak with the tongues of men and Angels*, and possess it not, he is *become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal*; and though he have the gift of prophecy, and *understand all mysteries, and all knowledge*, and though he have all faith, so that he could remove mountains, and have not love, *he is nothing*; and though he bestow all his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be burned, and have it not, *it profiteth him nothing*: 2 Cor. xiii. 1--3. We must enquire whether this love *suffers long*, and is *kind*? whether it does not *envy*, nor *act rashly*; is not *puffed up*; does not behave itself *unyeemly*! *seeketh not its own*; is not *provoked*;

thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth, believeth, hopeth, endureth all things? Or which comes to the same thing, whether it be accompanied with *long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance?* These Sir, are the fruits of the spirit of God, as that Spirit himself has delineated them in the Holy Scriptures; and if these fruits are to be considered as an infallible test of the *Integrity* of a *Teacher* of religion, which I do not deny, sure I am, many that sustain that character must stand convicted of *hypocrisy*. You indeed, are so charitable as to suppose the *whole nation* to be possessed of them, although like the bulk of all other nations, it *lays in wickedness*, and abounds with vices, of all kinds, the very reverse of these fruits of the Spirit;—with cursing, swearing, sabbath-breaking, lying, slander, defrauding, oppressing, revelling, drunkenness, uncleanness, pride, ambition, covetousness, self-indulgence; ungodliness, unrighteousness, intemperance. Yet if we believe you, *love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, and temperance*, fill our land, and are every where to be met with; and those that teach the contrary you term *disaffected Teachers*: that is, those that cannot prevail on themselves to call *evil good*, and *good evil*, to put *darkness* for light, and *light* for *darkness*, *bitter* for *sweet*, and *sweet* for *bitter*, but have learned to distinguish the one from the other, and while they recommend the one, bear their testimony against the other, are *disaffected Teachers*, and such I believe, the Prince of darkness thinks them to be, even disaffected to him and hostile to his cause and interest. But let me ask you, Sir, *doth a fountain send forth, at the same place, sweet water and bitter?* Can a fig-tree bear olive berries, or a vine figs? So can no fountain
both

both yield salt water and fresh. The Truth, I suppose is, Rev. Sir, you mistake mere *heathen virtue* for the *fruits of the Spirit of God*; and because, upon the whole, we are a *happy, and prosperous, magnanimous, generous, and merciful* nation, having, as you say, *peace within our walls, and plenteousness within our palaces and houses*, you therefore conclude that we have *peace with God, love to all mankind, and joy in the Holy Ghost*. But be assured, Sir, the *fruits of the Spirit* are as far above these effects of mere *nature and education*, as the *Kingdom of God* is above the kingdoms of this world; or as *Jesus Christ* is superior to *Socrates or Plato*.

As to the rest of your Sermon, I have no material fault to find with it. I never will throw cold water on zeal for the government, nor take upon me to censure any testimony, however feeble, borne in favour of Loyalty to our amiable King, and of attachment to our excellent Constitution. And I am sure that the Methodists in general are of my mind in this matter. One of the Minutes of our last Conference, held in London in the beginning of August last, is, 1. "None of us shall, either in writing or conversation, speak lightly or irreverently of the Government under which he lives. 2. We are to observe, that the oracles of God command us to be subject to the *Higher Powers*, and that honour to the King, is there connected with the fear of God." Nor are we, as a Body, less attached to the Church than to the State. We in general, cordially approve, even of her service, and much more of her doctrines, as contained in her *Articles, Homilies, and Liturgy*; only we are sorry, we have ever any cause to complain that they are departed from by those that are appointed to explain, enforce and defend

F 2

them,

them. And solely out of attachment to the Church, and that our people may have no inducement to omit attending divine service there, at all opportunities, we take care, in general, not to interfere with her hours of service, but to hold our meetings, on the Lord's day, at those times which leave the people at perfect liberty to attend divine worship in their parish Churches, both *forenoon* and *afternoon*. It is true, we have some exceptions to this general rule; but they are very few. 1. In some places, not a dozen perhaps in all England, where the parishes are very wide, and the people live several miles distant from the church, we preach in church hours. We do the same, 2dly, in some places where the Church Ministers are notoriously wicked, or strenuously inculcate doctrines which we judge of dangerous tendency, as salvation by the merit of works, or *absolute, unconditional Predestination*; or the various branches of the Socinian doctrine, as the denial of the depravity of human nature, of the divinity and atonement of Christ, of the influences of divine grace, and of the immortality of the soul. And 3dly, we do this also in a few large towns, as Birmingham, Sheffield, Manchester and Liverpool, where the lower classes of people are very numerous, very ignorant, and very wicked; and where the churches and other places of worship will by no means contain all the inhabitants; and where there are many thousands who never have been accustomed to go to church, having been brought up Dissenters. But even at these places, we avoid administering the Lord's Supper, that our Societies may, at all opportunities, communicate in the established Church, which many thousands of them fail not steadily to do.

I assure

I assure you, therefore, Sir, we can in general cordially unite with you in saying, "Whoever be those Teachers, who, under the appearance of religion, would disturb our happiness in the world by undermining the Church, which (at least as to its doctrines) is apostolical; or the state, which is so admirably constituted; whoever, instead of the love of our King, of our country, and of each other, are labouring to promote hatred, variance, emulations; whoever, in the place of joy and peace, would bring in wrath and strife; whoever, instead of a Catholic Faith uniformly professed, (altho' alas! by few possessed! would introduce heresies and schisms; whoever, in the place of long-suffering and obedience to the powers which are ordained of God, which he has commanded us to obey, would introduce sedition and rebellion, *ye shall know them by their fruits.* They are not the spirits which are of God. They are earthly, sensual, devilish: though they may *come to you in sheep's clothing, yet inwardly they are ravening wolves.*" Thank God, Sir, not one word of this applies to the Methodists; and if you think it do, I call upon you to prove it.

As to the *Socinian* doctrine, we no more approve of it than you do. It appears to us, in almost all its branches, as well as in that you mention, to proceed from a *spirit of error*, and to tend to the subversion, not of a few unimportant opinions, but of the whole of Christianity. By denying the depravity of human nature, it takes away the necessity of a *new birth*, or *new creation*, and reduces the holiness and righteousness inculcated in the Bible, to a few scraps of dry, external, heathen virtue. By taking away the merit of the sacrifice of Christ offered upon the cross,

it undermines the only foundation of a sinner's hope, or sets him upon the vain and fruitless labour of establishing it, on what is altogether insufficient for its support, his own imperfect works of righteousness. By affirming that the influence of the divine Spirit is not now to be expected, it either discourages those enslaved to evil dispositions and habits, from attempting to become *new creatures*; or it induces them to rest contented with a mere outward change of conduct, while a *new heart* is not given unto them, nor a *new spirit* renewed within them. And lastly, by denying the immortality of the soul, as it is well known, a certain Socinian Writer in high repute, has done, even supposing it allows a general resurrection, and a future judgment, it destroys one of the most powerful motives to virtue and holiness, the expectation of being with the Lord immediately upon the death of the body; while, at the same time, if the doctrine of *Materialism* be added thereto, as it is by some Philosophers, and *Man*, formed after the image of God, be reduced to a mere Machine, all whose motions of mind and body are as mechanical as those of a Clock or Watch, it in fact destroys the freedom of the human will, establishes the *unavoidable necessity* of all our actions, and annihilates a future judgment, and of course must end in *Deism*, if not in *Atheism*.

Upon the whole, amidst all the mistakes which you have made in your sermon, and which I believe have proceeded from your ignorance of the people you take upon you to censure, I am happy to declare my entire coincidence with you in doctrine when you teach that "the conduct which will secure our happiness both in this
world

world and the next, is prescribed in one short command of holy Scripture—*Fear God, and honour the King*, by which religion and loyalty are coupled together.” And whatever you (who, it seems, are but little acquainted with the state of things in this kingdom) may suppose, this is what the Methodists in particular, uniformly and constantly inculcate, and for the practice of which they are most notorious. As they are already become one of the most numerous and increasing bodies of people in the British dominions, so are they noted every where for loyalty to the King, as well as for piety to God, and righteousness to man. Nor had his present Majesty, perhaps, in all his empire, a friend more firmly attached to his person and government, than the late Rev. Mr. *Wesley*, as his various publications, particularly during the American war, have made appear. And his Societies have almost universally imbibed the same spirit; nor can any insinuations of yours to the contrary, rob them of their glory in this, any more than in the other instance. They *fear God and honour the King* in their hearts, not from *policy*, but from *principle*, and give daily proof of it in their conversation and behaviour. Having sworn allegiance to the King, *God hath set upon his holy Hill of Zion, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords*, they are subject also to all his *Vicegerents, Deputies, or Ministers* on earth, yea, to every ordinance of man for his sake; and are careful to render unto *Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, as well as unto God the things which are God's*. Wishing, Rev. Sir, that when you again take upon you to censure a whole people, or divers descriptions of people, you will first make yourself better acquainted
with

with them, that you may stand clear of the guilt of a Calumniator, and only speak what you know. I remain, with all due respect, Rev. Sir, your obedient Servant in the pure truth of the Gospel.

JOSEPH BENSON.

Manchester,
Feb. 20, 1793.

F I N I S.

Lately Published.

B Y

J. BENSON.

REMARKS on Dr. Priestley's System of Materialism and Necessity; in a Series of Letters to the Rev. Mr. Wesley. Price 9d.

AN ESSAY towards the Proof of an Immortal Spirit in Man. Price 6d.

A RATIONAL VINDICATION of the Catholic Faith,—being the first Part of a Vindication of Christ's Divinity, begun by the Rev. J. Fletcher. Price 1s. 6d.

SOCINIANISM UNSCRIPTURAL, or the *Prophets* and *Apostles* vindicated from the charge of holding the doctrine of Christ's mere humanity; being the second Part of a Vindication of his Divinity, inscribed to the Rev. Dr. Priestley, by the late Rev. John Fletcher. To which is added, in a large detail of Instances, a *Demonstration* of the want of common sense in the New Testament Writers, on the supposition of their believing and teaching the above-mentioned Doctrine.--Price 2s.

TWO SERMONS on Sanctification. Price 6d.

TWO SERMONS on the Nature and Design of the Gospel. Price 4d.

A SERMON preached at the Chapel in Cherry-street, Birmingham, on occasion of the death of Mrs. Foster. Price 4d.

A SERMON, on the death of the Rev. Mr. Wesley, preached at the ensuing Conference of the Preachers, held at Manchester, July 26, 1792. Price 3d.

